

Colombian Government is under great stress now, and because they can't begin to deal with the challenges posed by the drug traffickers in Colombia without extra support—not only to build up their forces, their police forces in the country but also to give alternatives to those who are growing the plants, the coca plants, to find another way to make a living, and to do other things that will deal with some of the border problems we have in the countries that border Colombia.

But I think most of us have seen that democracy itself is under great stress throughout the Andean region, in no small measure because of the power of the drug traffickers. And I say again, Colombia is the oldest democracy in Latin America, and I believe their very way of life is under stress because of this. And I think that if we were to pass this quickly, and then send a clear signal to the Colombians that we support democracy and we support their efforts against the drug traffickers, you would see a big response from other countries of the world to help them. The world would rally behind them. It would, I believe, change the entire psychology of the drama that is unfolding down there.

And if it's a battle that we lose to the drug traffickers, the price would not only be more drugs on the streets of America but also potentially destabilizing the entire Andean region and the whole move we've seen these last 15 or 20 years toward democracy in South America and throughout Latin America. It's very troubling to me. And I think there are people in the Congress—I know there are, in both parties—who strongly agree.

We all know that the Senate operates differently, on different rules, than the House. We all know there are all kinds of problems and conflicting interests. But this is something we really ought to put beyond that. And I think that what happened is that this emergency supplemental got caught up in a whole lot of conflicting pressures in the Senate and the ability of those who disagree with one thing or another to use the rules to delay it. But somehow we've got to cut through all this. The national interest in Colombia and in the other things that I itemized just cries out for action. It's just imperative that we get it as quickly as possible.

Q. Mr. President, have you talked to Senator Lott directly about this, in trying to move some of these things? And what —

The President. I have, I have. I've talked to him on more than one occasion. I have not talked to him since I've been back, because I haven't had a chance to this morning; I've been working all day. But I will talk to him.

Q. What—what is his counterargument?

The President. I believe that on the merits, I think he wants to do it. And you know, it's a difficult situation. I think what is required is for everybody in the Senate to recognize that this is something we ought to just put beyond whatever the other squabbles are, and get it done and put it behind us. And so—I believe he wants to do that, and I hope we can find a way to do that.

Peruvian Elections

Q. Mr. President, would you like to see the U.S. take any action toward Peru—possible sanctions, or anything—regarding irregularities in their recent election?

The President. Well, we just got back from my trip. I think I ought to have a chance to talk about all that. I haven't—I don't feel—I may not know enough to answer that. I'm disappointed, obviously, that the election didn't unfold as we thought it would after the first round. And I have to figure out exactly what all the reasons are and get a briefing before I can make a comment beyond that.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:28 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

Statement on the Earthquake in Indonesia

June 6, 2000

I was saddened to learn of the earthquakes that shook the island of Sumatra and other parts of Indonesia. On behalf of the American people, I extend my deepest sympathies to all those who have suffered losses and injuries.

The United States is providing emergency assistance to support relief efforts and stands ready to provide further help to meet the needs of those affected by the earthquake.

Remarks on Departure for Tokyo, Japan, and an Exchange With Reporters

June 7, 2000

Clinical Trials/Patients' Bill of Rights

The President. Good morning everyone. We are here at this early hour to talk about a vitally important issue to the health of America's senior citizens—indeed, eventually, to the health of all of us.

We must help more seniors participate in clinical trials that test new therapies for illnesses, from cancer to heart disease to Alzheimers. These trials may prolong lives, and they are central to finding cures for deadly diseases.

Today, America's seniors are badly under-represented in clinical trials, yet they bear the heaviest share of illness. More than half of our cancer patients are over 65, but only a third of those in clinical trials are seniors. For breast cancer, the statistics are even worse.

Today, thousands of important clinical trials don't have enough patients because so few seniors are able to take part, and that means slower progress towards curing or treating illness. One major factor keeping seniors out of clinical trials is patients lack of certainty that their expenses will be covered by insurance. Because Medicare's policies on payment for clinical trials have been unclear, seniors cannot be sure of coverage if they volunteer for experimental care. Many assume they'll be saddled with thousands of dollars in routine medical costs if they participate, and they clearly cannot bear such a heavy burden.

For several years, Vice President Gore has led our efforts to clean up the confusion and help seniors and people with disabilities into clinical trials. We've had bipartisan support in Congress, led by Senators Rockefeller and Mack and Congresswoman Johnson and Congressman Bentsen and Congressman Cardin.

Today, after careful study, I am signing an executive memorandum directing Medicare to change its policy and remove a major barrier to seniors' participation in these trials. Within a week, Medicare will begin to cover

all the routine medical costs of participation in a clinical trial.

The Department of Health and Human Services and the Health Care Financing Administration will begin outreach programs so that patients, as well as doctors, researchers, and administrators, all are aware of the change. We'll ask for the help of advocates for patients and research who have done so much to publicize this issue. We believe that with good outreach, thousands of seniors could join trials this year and make a dramatic contribution to the progress of medicine, as well as to the health of older Americans.

I am also directing today the Department of Health and Human Services to report back to me on ways we can provide additional support to clinical trials that are especially relevant to senior citizens and am requesting that the National Institutes of Health look for ways we can encourage even more seniors to speed science's progress by participating in new clinical trials.

As America ages, we must provide all our seniors affordable, quality health care, and we should be using our cutting-edge science to meet that challenge. Simply put, the more seniors we enroll in trials, the faster we'll be able to use these advances to save American lives. We've done this successfully with cancer in children. For decades now, more than half of all the children with cancer have joined clinical trials, giving us a wealth of evidence about how the disease works and how best to fight it. Now we can cure three-quarters of childhood cancers. That could never have happened without the participation of children in these trials. We should be doing the same for Americans of every age.

Today I've authorized Medicare to help seniors participate. Private health care plans should be doing the same for their members. But it won't happen also unless Congress takes the next step and passes a strong Patients' Bill of Rights. Congress has had that on its agenda for 6 months now in the Norwood-Dingell bill, which includes a requirement that every private insurer cover the cost of participation in clinical trials.

This month, before the summer recess, Congress has a window of opportunity to take